

On September 17, 1787, 39 individuals signed a document that changed the history of our nation—and the world. To mark that special date today, we take time on September 17, also known as Citizenship and Constitution Day, to celebrate the timeless document that laid the foundation for the rights we enjoy as Americans.

Written 223 years ago, the United States Constitution has managed to withstand the test of time with only 27 changes, or amendments. Amendments to the Constitution must be approved by a two-thirds vote of Congress then submitted to the states. Three-fourths of the states must ratify an amendment for it to become law. The threshold for ratification is very high; while more than 11,000 amendments have been brought before Congress, only 33 have been approved and sent to the states, and only 27 of those have actually been ratified.

The Constitution holds special meaning for me. As I was sworn in to be your Representative in Congress, I placed my hand on a Bible and swore to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States.” It is because of that deep abiding commitment to the Constitution that Congress prioritized celebration of the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution many years ago.

In 1940, Congress designated the third Sunday in May as “I am an American Day” to encourage civic engagement and reflection upon the meaning of citizenship. On February 29, 1952, Congress changed the date to September 17th, and renamed it “Citizenship Day.” Now, following an amendment to the 2004 Omnibus spending bill, we celebrate “Citizenship and Constitution Day” each September 17. In fact, since 2005 U.S. elementary and high schools have been observing this date by preparing and delivering specific lessons on the U.S. Constitution for students.

On this Citizenship and Constitution Day, I encourage special reflection upon the document that expresses our rights as American citizens. You may be interested to know that my office has pocket-sized Constitutions available free of charge for all who would like them. Teachers, as well as leaders of civic youth groups, have found them particularly useful. Please contact my Washington office at 202-225-4806 or visit my website, Fortenberry.house.gov, for more information.